



SAFETY IN SCOUTING IN BERKSHIRE



MINIBUS INSPECTION & MAINTENANCE

This fact sheet reviews the need for inspection and maintenance of Scout owned minibuses. It does not discuss the driver licensing requirements, use abroad or other similar issues, since legal advice is readily available from government agencies and motoring organisations, in addition to advice given by the vehicle manufacturer and of course, The Scout Association. See also the local factsheet “Minibus Driver Licensing Requirements” on Berkshire Scouts’ Safety web page.

As with all vehicles, the driver has ultimate responsibility for the legal use of any minibus and they must have a current motor vehicle driving licence for the class of vehicle they are driving. It is not a requirement of the Scout Association or of Berkshire Scouts for drivers to hold a MIDAS certificate. However, Executive Committees should note that MIDAS trained and certificated drivers have had their competence assessed, and this should help reassure those that approve activities (and their associated risks) involving the use of minibuses.

As well as ensuring their competence as a driver, MIDAS training clearly explains the legal requirements of the driver – in terms of vehicle loading, passenger safety, safety checks and mandatory safety equipment. Amongst other providers, MIDAS training is available in Berkshire from BSEL (see <http://www.bsel.org.uk/index.php/training>), and from other organisations.

The Vehicle

What is a minibus? It is a road vehicle specially constructed for the carriage of persons, in our case both young people and adults. It was designed and built to certain criteria – amongst which - one person to each seat with no significant in-board stowage facilities for tents, marine craft etc. Bear in mind that the legal load limit for most minibuses is actually less than the full complement of adults, and certainly leaves little scope for luggage weight. Also, the maximum load allowed on any roof-rack is actually very small...

If the vehicle is used for towing, it needs to be properly adapted for the towing. Are the rear doors able to be fully opened when the towing hitch is attached? The design also naturally assumes that drivers and those persons that maintain the minibus are competent. Not only should the competent mechanic charged with its ongoing maintenance, know how to check tyre pressures, coolant levels, hydraulic fluids, crankcase oil, lights, wipers, tyre condition etc – but each driver must have similar competence to ensure appropriate maintenance when ‘on the road’.

The competent mechanic will have a copy the manufacturer's maintenance information, including the recommended service types and intervals. He or she will have the necessary skill, knowledge and tools to be able to effect most of the basic inspections and maintenance. *And, he or she will have that absolute quality of admitting to the Scout Executive Committee that a particular task is beyond their capability, and that professional help is needed – perhaps at a significant cost.*

What is a minibus? Firstly, it can be driven by a number of different drivers, some regularly, others perhaps most infrequently. Do we insist that the minibus is only used for transporting people, and that excessive point loading caused by the carriage of particularly heavy items is prohibited? Is there the right culture and procedure for admitting and reporting to the mechanic or 'minibus manager', the recent driving over some pretty bumpy ground, or the striking a curb stone or the hearing of some strange noise from the vehicle? Indeed, is there a 'fault log' kept in the vehicle (alongside the mileage, driver and use log) – and do all drivers actually check the condition of the vehicle before and after every journey (even before and after a four hour drive to camp on a Friday evening, after work)?

Is there a fully equipped first aid kit and a fire extinguisher on board – are checks on their serviceability recorded? Are insurance and breakdown cover details kept within the vehicle? How does the driver know to what pressure to inflate tyres? Is there a hi-vis waistcoat or two kept on board for the road-side breakdowns, and there sufficient adults in the party to properly supervise those young people who have to get off the minibus at the side of the road in case of accident or breakdown? Is the vehicle covered by a breakdown assistance service such as the AA or RAC, for example, to help get the party back on the road.

Does the mechanic actually check the condition of wheel bearings, brake pads, swivel joints, steering joints, seat fixings, seat belts, seat belt anchorage points, etc, more frequently than the 'annual service' – perhaps at pre-scheduled intervals of every three months or 3,000 miles. Does the mechanic make a note when hydraulic fluids are 'topped up'? And of course, is the minibus properly and adequately financed by its owning Group or District?

In summary, the road traffic acts, other associated legislation and official guidance is in place to reduce the number of accidents. We cannot totally eliminate breakdowns, and we cannot totally eliminate accidents. But we can do *all* that is 'reasonably practicable' (whilst keeping at minimum within the law) to ensure that the likelihood of these is 'almost nil'. *It is the responsibility of the relevant Executive Committee* to manage risk and ensure that our young persons and adults are not put in unnecessary danger, by having robust and transparent minibus use and maintenance systems in place.

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